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BRIEF REMARKS

ON THE

PRESENT STATE

OF

AGRICULTURAL DISTRESS:

SHOWING

SOME OF THE CAUSES THEREOF;

AND

SUGGESTING A FEW HINTS BY WAY
OF REMEDY.

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BRIEF REMARKS, &c.

AT the present period, when all classes of the community are so affected by the depressed state of trade and agriculture, it is fit that some stir be made towards obtaining a redress of those grievances under which they have so long laboured, and which oppress, so heavily, the agriculturist and trader.

In taking a view of our statutory enactments, it must be admitted, that they evince the fact, that we are essentially governed by a LANDED INTEREST; and that our laws are so based as to protect the landed proprietors, without that regard to the mercantile portion of the community, which free and honest representatives ought to entertain.

Doubtless, there are many in parliament, who gain and have gained their wealth by mercantile and manufacturing pursuits; but the majority of members of the legislature being landowners, it is natural that the greater part of our statutes should be favourable rather than detrimental to their interests.

The time is, however, now arrived, when both the agriculturist and trader must work hand-in-hand towards throwing off a yoke which has so long oppressed them.—The cry has long been made, but hitherto very partially responded to.—The oppressive system of aristocratical sway has been too heavily felt; and now is there a determination upon the part of the industrial portion of the community, to lie no longer under those burdens to which they have so silently submitted.

As regards the depressed state of agriculture, many may attribute it to the Repeal of the Corn Laws; and, perhaps, there may be some truth in supposing that the alteration has been felt by the farmers. But is that any reason, I would ask, why we should advocate the system of “Protection?”—

Certainly not. If the agriculturist is to be protected, why not protect the tradesman? Does the tradesman sound any alarm when a tax or duty, which formerly raised the price of his article, is repealed? He knows full well, that it is for the benefit of the public, and he submits.—So must it be with the agriculturist. It is true, there can be no statute passed for the common good, without affecting private interest. We sympathize with the agriculturist, but we forget the thousands of our fellow-countrymen in the manufacturing districts, struggling amidst squalid wretchedness to obtain the bare necessities of life; and we pass by the poor agricultural labourer, who is compelled to maintain himself upon a pittance which scarcely supplies him with bread, and which renders him as servile and depressed as any object of most feudal bondage.

The only question which has to be inquired into is, the remedy for the present state of the agriculturist. The cause may be attributed to the unhealthy system of competition in the hiring of farms, which has raised the price of land to a rate unequal to its produce.—To the ready procuring of money, which has enabled men of no capital to offer recklessly an exorbitant price for farms.—To the present stagnant state of the money market, owing, in a great measure, to the want of confidence which now so generally exists; and which makes bankers and money brokers unusually careful in making loans.—And to the oppressive taxation, under which, not only the farmer, but every individual of the community, labours.

What then is the remedy? not the clamorous cry for “Protection,” but the natural system of Free Trade, both in agricultural and all other articles of life; and such a reduction of rent and taxation, as will be equal to the produce of the farmer, and which fair and average crops will enable him to pay.

But, perhaps, the rich landlord will inquire—“What am I to do, if my rents are lowered?” the reply is, the burden is mutual, and must be equally borne; and all will, of course, be naturally affected by the change; and there is no reason,

why the landed proprietor should not bear his portion of the national grievance, as others.

What would be said if house proprietors were to ask for protection, and solicit parliament for a heavy impost upon bricks and timber, to deter parties from building, and prevent an increase in the number of houses.—Are not the owners of houses obliged to reduce their rents? Instances there are in our towus, of houses being reduced to one-half, and even to one-third, their former rent.—What says the lauded proprietor at his income being thus proportionately reduced.—The only answer is, that he must submit to the changes and exigencies of the times, and the effects of increased population and taxation. His lot is no harder than that of the house proprietor instanced above; and he has had, moreover, the additional advantage of unhealthy competition, by which the price of his land has been exorbitantly and unnatrally raised.

As respects the comparative ease of the landowner from taxation, regard has been always had, in our legal enactments, to the landed interest; and the taxes and duties connected with real property have always been considerably less than those upon commerce and industry—of the equity thereof, I leave my readers to judge.

As examples, I would quote the exemption, from duty, of the heir or devisee of real property, whilst the legatee of personal property is taxed in a manner comparatively unjust.—Let any impartial man examine the duties upon land, with those upon trade and industry, and see how comparatively light are those of the former to those of the latter. As an instance, I would take that of an ordinary tradesman or farmer, with a stock or capital of (say) from *fifteen hundred to two thousand pounds*; upon his death, his representatives, before they can legally take possession of his property, are liable to a probate duty of *forty pounds*, if he die leaving a will; and *sixty*, if he die without. In addition to this, the legatees are liable to a further duty upon the sum bequeathed to them, before they receive their bequests.—At the same

time, how stands the man of real property ? *he is totally free from any such imposition*—and yet far better able to bear such a tax. To do justice to all parties, real property should not only be liable to similar imposts as personal property, but even upon an increased scale ; for the former is real and fixed, whereas the latter is uncertain and fluctuating. But, perhaps, some will say, that real property is liable to stamp duty upon sale or mortgage. True it is, but in a proportion far below the duties payable upon personal property at decease. I noticed above that the probate duties upon the example which I adduced, would be *forty and sixty pounds*, according as a party died testate or intestate.—And now what is the duty imposed upon a mortgage or conveyance of similar amount ? only *six pounds* in the former, and *twelve* in the latter case.—Is this then justice or equality of taxation ? Is this a system which ought to be tolerated ? and yet the landowners say, they cannot afford to lower their rents, when they are the men that are least taxed ; and they know the rental to be in general, so high, that the honest farmer cannot raise a living.

Again, the present system of Income and Property Tax is equally unjust.—That income, derivable from property, should be assessed in the same manner as income derived from trade and industry, is unfair and disproportionate ; yet, to all this, have the trader and professional man, as well as the agriculturist, to submit.

If we are to be burdened with Income Tax, which, by the way, is as unjust as it is inquisitorial, I would contend, that it ought not to be altogether assessed *upon the income*, but upon *the capital employed in the raising such income*.—It is grossly unfair for the tradesman, earning *five hundred pounds* a year, upon, probably, a capital of *one thousand or fifteen hundred pounds* to be assessed in the same ratio with the landed proprietor possessing the same income, derivable from a capital equal to *ten or twelve thousand pounds, or even more* ; and that fixed and certain, and not subject to those risks to which even the most industrious and attentive man is frequently liable.

The landowner forgets that professions and trades are taxed, not only with Income Tax, but have other imposts upon each particular branch.—Thus is the solicitor liable to an annual payment of *twelve pounds* if resident in London, and *eight pounds* in the country; in addition to the sum of *one hundred and twenty pounds* upon indenture, and *twenty-five pounds* upon admission.—The banker, too, is liable to a payment of *thirty pounds*; the pawnbroker, to *seven pounds, ten shillings*; the auctioneer, to *ten pounds*; the dealer in foreign wines, to *ten pounds, ten shillings*; the vinegar maker to *five pounds, five shillings*; and I may go on to instance the many duties upon innkeepers, beer and spirit retailers, stage coach proprietors, and vendors of different articles—such as stamped patent medicines, game, tea, coffee, tobacco, &c., &c.; all which fall heavily upon the commercial and industrious man, and not only materially lessen his profits, but, added to the further burdens of local and assessed taxes, surround him with difficulties, which frequently end in disappointment and despair;—and lead to the loud outcry for reform in every branch of the national expenditure!

The honest well-wisher to the common weal, who advocates a system of Financial Reform, is not unfrequently reproached with the names of “Chartist” and “Republican;” but let it not be forgotten, that if a man feels from experience the burden of taxation and refuses submission to the unjust yoke, is he in no way less patriotic to his country or less loyal to his queen. All he desires and expects is, an amelioration of his grievances, by such a reduction of the national expenditure as will induce a decrease of taxation; and whilst it will render unnecessary the waging of aggressive wars abroad, will, at the same time, tend to promote happiness and prosperity at home.

I feel that I need add no more: what I have adduced will sufficiently convince every right-minded man, that we are governed by a landed interest, and that the burdens upon real property are light compared with the heavy imposts upon industry and commerce.

This fact being apparent, it is the duty of the landowners to go hand-in-hand with their tenantry; and under a conviction that the interests of the one are naturally interwoven in those of the other, to effect such a fair reduction of the rent-roll as will satisfy the agriculturist; and whilst it will enable him to gain a comfortable competence, will also induce him to employ an increased number of labourers, and decrease the present heavy burden of poor-rates.—Thus will the land proprietors render the agriculturist portion of the community important and influential members of the state.

In conclusion, what I have addressed has been from conviction that some measures must be adopted to preserve the agriculturists, or sad may be the result both to landlords and themselves. It is folly looking to parliament to adopt steps, which, though beneficial to a smaller portion of society, is, doubtless, prejudicial to the greater. Regard must be had to the welfare of the bulk of our population; and laws, beneficial to the majority, must, at all times, be submitted to by the minority. England is, essentially, a commercial and trading country. Her vessels traverse all parts of the wide ocean; and whilst her mercantile transactions are so great, every measure must be taken to throw open her harbours, for the free export and import of domestic and foreign manufactures and produce.

The remedy, then, for the present distress in agriculture, does not rest with parliament. It rests *individually with the landlords*; and it is their duty and good sense to consider their interests bound up with those of their tenants; and, being convinced, that they must yield, in some measure, to the changes and exigencies of the times, to meet their tenants upon such fair and reasonable terms in reduction of their rentals, as will, in the end, preserve the agriculturist from loss, and restore the blessings of quietude and contentment.

FINIS.